

Tips for School Business Officers on Supporting Healthy School Meals

As a result of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is implementing updated nutrition standards for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, which go into effect this school year.

Healthy school meals are important because healthy children learn better. Research shows that students who do not have reliable, healthy meals in kindergarten are noticeably behind their peers in reading and math by the third grade. Healthy eating helps prevent diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, and helps children grow up to be healthier, more productive members of society.

Here are some ways school business officers can help ensure the new school meal standards are implemented successfully:

- Apply for the six cents per lunch reimbursement with your State Child Nutrition Program. If your school is meeting the new nutrition standards, you qualify for these additional funds.
- Analyze current paid meal and a la carte item prices to ensure they reflect the true cost of purchasing, preparing, and selling them, including indirect costs.
 - The average school uses revenues from its reimbursable meals to offset the cost of meals for upper-income students and a la carte foods, which is bad for the bottom-line and children's health. A national meal cost study conducted by USDA found that revenues from non-reimbursable foods (such as foods sold a la carte) fell short of the cost of producing those foods by an average of 29 percent.
- Price a la carte items to ensure the school breakfast or lunch is the best deal for students.
 - By making the reimbursable meal more financially attractive to students, you can increase participation in the school meal programs. This is better for schools financially. When children purchase a meal rather than a la carte, schools receive both cash and commodity reimbursements from USDA (almost extra 50 cents per lunch).
- Investigate what indirect costs are being charged to food service in your district. Work to reduce indirect charges to make more funds available for healthy school foods.
 - In some districts, food service programs are expected to pay for services that other school departments are not. For example, the science department does not pay for the electricity used in classrooms, the math department does not pay a share of janitors' wages, and the art program does not budget for the superintendent's salary. The more money a food service program pays in indirect costs, the less funding available for healthy school food.





- Increase participation in the school meal programs.
 - Encourage all students to apply for free meals. By encouraging all students to apply, you increase the number of eligible students applying to receive free and reduced-price lunch, and reduce stigma of submitting the paperwork.
 - Do not have a separate a la carte line in school cafeterias. Placing a la carte items in the regular meal line reduces stigma for students who receive free or reduced-priced meals and exposes all students to the school meals (so they can see the options and see that it is a good deal).
- Increase school meal appeal -- present food attractively; cook vegetables to preserve vibrant color; vary the cuts of fruits, vegetables, sandwiches; use catchy or appealing names like Zippin' Zucchini or Southwest Chipotle Chicken Sandwich, etc.
- Implement cafeteria practices that promote healthy choices.
 - Look at the set up of the cafeteria. Are there other cafeteria configurations that would promote better student flow and selections?
 - Change the placement and prominence of healthier choices. For example place plain milk closer to the students than chocolate milk, have healthier options before less healthy options in the serving lines, place fruit in colorful bowls, etc.
- Reduce plate waste; make sure students not only participate in the meal programs, but eat the healthy options.
 - Get students involved -- have student ambassadors who strategize how to get peers involved and excited about school meals, taste tests, voting on meal options, student-led school food marketing campaigns, recipe contests, etc.
 - Send information home to parents -- send a letter or include messages in the school newsletter and website about the improvements to school meals, provide tips for how parents can reinforce healthy eating at home, invite parents to eat lunch at school, have taste tests and a school nutrition table at parent nights, encourage parents to participate on a school wellness policy or health committee, etc.
 - Conduct taste tests of new fruit, vegetable and whole grain offerings. This will familiarize students with new offerings and help food service determine which options students enjoy the most.
 - If you need help for taste tests, ask community groups, food banks, or parents volunteer.
- Implement healthy fundraisers in your school. Healthy fundraisers set a positive example and support nutrition education, healthy eating by children, and parents' efforts to feed their children healthfully. Schools have found healthy fundraising options to be practical and profitable.

Resources

School Meal Funds

Fact Sheet: Cost of New Meal Standards (CSPI)

<http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/cost-fact-sheet.pdf>

Paid Lunch Equity Tool (USDA)

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2012/SP22-2012ra.xls>

Indirect Costs Powerpoint Presentation (School Nutrition Association)

http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Legislation/IndirectCosts_SNA7-11.pdf

Increase Participation and Reduce Plate Waste

Tip Sheet for Increasing Meal Appeal (CSPI)

<http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/b2s-tips-kids-eat-healthier.pdf>

Smarter Lunchrooms: Arrange Lunchroom to Promote Healthy Eating (Cornell University)

<http://smarterlunchrooms.org/start.html>

Fact Sheet: Improving Access to Healthy Meals (Food Research and Action Center)

http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/back_to_school_strategies_2010.pdf

Fruit and Vegetables Galore: Increase Meal Appeal (USDA)

http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resources/fv_galore.html

Recipe Contests (Fuel Up to Play 60)

<http://school.fueluptoplay60.com/playbook/play.php?id=15812006>

Fundraisers

Sweet Deals: School Fundraising Can Be Healthy and Profitable (CSPI)

Report: <http://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/schoolfundraising.pdf>

Fact Sheet: http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/sweet_deals_one-pager.pdf

Fundraising Ideas: <http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/fundraiserfactsheet.pdf>